

Windham mulls housing concerns

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WINDHAM/WILLIMANTIC — The Windham Town Council is continuing to discuss affordable housing options for Windham and Willimantic residents.

Last week, the Partnership For Strong Communities presented Windham housing data at a town council meeting.

The Partnership is a statewide program dedicated to ending homelessness and creating more affordable housing options.

The presentation occurred as part of Windham's effort to earn Sustainable CT certification.

Councilor Dawn Niles said Windham has a chance to win a bronze award in the Sustainable CT program.

The statewide program does not only focus on sustainability and energy effectiveness, but also community-wide issues like education, affordable housing and more.

The presentation comes at a time when Windham town leaders are working to address homelessness issues in Willimantic and Windham.

For example, town leaders are considering an ordinance to ban sleeping in public and private spaces, but are also working to offer other places for homeless people to stay.

Charles Patton, the Partnership's senior policy analyst, presented the council with data points that compare Windham to other towns in Connecticut.

Windham is on the lower median housing income level. Windham's median household income of \$41,398 ranks 164th among Connecticut's 169 municipalities.

According to the data, 59 percent of the town's renters and 36 percent of its homeowners spend 30 percent or more of their income on housing, according to Patton.

Spending 30 percent or more on housing reduces a family's opportunity to spend on other important items, such as transportation and education.

Off-campus Eastern Connecticut State University and University of Connecticut students also create a challenge. These age groups increase demand for rental housing.

"It seems to have been a challenge to our community having off-campus housing," Councilman Thomas DeVivo said. Students can save money when they live off-campus, according to DeVivo.

"But it displaces our residents, our working families and it compromises their housing because there's competition," Councilor Rose Reyes said.

Reyes recommended supportive housing, which includes social services for people in need.

Expensive housing is a barrier to homeless populations. In Windham, for example, the necessary hourly wage to afford a typical two-bedroom apartment is \$18.06.

"Now I'm very concerned because I'm looking at your housing rate, and Connecticut can't even pass a \$15 living wage," Niles said. "How do we do all this?"

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